DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 225 SP 030 569

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TITLE Does the Use of Quantitative Criteria for Restricted Admissions Imply No Subjective Judgements?
PUB DATE 9 Aug 88
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Association of Teacher Educators Summer Workshop (Starkville, MS, August 9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Admission Criteria; Faculty Workload; Full Time Faculty; *Grade Point Average; Higher Education; Part Time Faculty; Preservice Teacher Education; *Selective Admission; *Standardized Tests; *Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Student Ratio

ABSTRACT

A description is given of the efforts taken by the elementary education department at a medium-sized mid-western state university to create and implement a restrictive admissions process. An unpredicted influx of students attempting to register for the three pre-professional courses required for program admission brought into focus the necessity for restricting admissions. Factors considered in determining the number of students to admit were: (1) number of full- and part-time faculty; (2) number of sections that could be offered; (3) maximum student-faculty ratios; (4) number of class sections needed per group of students; and (5) desirable distribution between undergraduate and graduate education. Eligibiity scores were set as follows: (1) minimum grade point average; (2) minimum grade point average in each of the pre-professional courses; and (3) the pre-professional skill test to cut off 170 in each of the subtests. Values in each of these are weighted and summed. The top 75 students ranked on total score would be admitted. Problems associated with this procedure are discussed, and changes to be made in the future are presented. (JD)

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ED299225

Does the Use of Quantitative Criteria for Restricted Admissions Imply No Subjective Judgements?

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Paper Presented at the Association of Teacher Educators
Summer Workshop
Mississippi State University
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August 9, 1988

SP030569

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Does the Use of Quantitative Criteria for Restricted Admissions Imply No Subjective Judgements?

When programs or schools are mandated to curtail enrollments, decision makers create selection processes which should be fair to students while meeting the need to limit. For the purposes of expediency and of objectivity, criteria used for selection purposes have commonly included: (1) grade point average (GPA), (2) grade point (GP) in targeted courses, and (3) scores on standardized tests. However, there are issues regarding these measures which require the use of subjectivity in arriving at final conclusions. The common belief that using quantitative criteria ensures objective decision making might be false.

The major objective of this Session is to acquaint the audience with issues concerning GPA, GP in three targeted pre-professional education courses (Public Education for the Future (EED 110), Social and Philosophical Issues in Elementary Education (EED 210), and Educational Psychology for the Elementary Teacher (EED215)), and Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) scores. The presenter, who has been active in a restricted admissions process since Fall 1986, has discovered that what has been considered clear objective measures are now causes for further study.

The following is a description of the efforts taken by the elementary education department at a medium-sized mid-western state university to create and implement a restrictive admissions process. In a restrictive admissions process only a limited number of eligible candidates can be admitted to a program.

Historically, this university had been able to admit all students who met the minimum admissions criteria. In Fall 1985, the criteria were: (1) minimum non-professional GPA 2.5, (2) successful completion of three pre-professional education courses (minimum 2.5 in each), and (3) an interview with a member of the faculty of the department.

During the fall the news media continued to substantiate the report, first released in the spring of 1985, that there would be a critical shortage of teachers in Michigan because of normal attrition and a incentive program for early retirement. During the regular registration period for Fall 1985, an unpredicted influx of students attempted to register for the three pre-professional courses required for program admission. The number of students far exceeded the available spaces. Members of the department had always been sensitive to the needs of the students. Thus, when faced with this scenario, they decided to teach large numbers of students in the assigned pre-professional courses. The faculty hoped that this measure would lead to the administration's allocating emergency funds by Winter 1986, for needed additional sections of professional courses. There was no doubt in the minds of the faculty that this would occur.

Overworked faculty members were disappointed, when for the Winter 1986 term, little extra money was allocated to the program. The numbers of students who met the criteria in place at that time, (Fall 1985) were ready to begin their professional program. Moreover, an increasing number of students were, more than figuratively, clamoring at the door to be admitted into the required three pre-professional courses.

Advice from the administration was to find a way to limit the number of students admitted to the program. It was suggested that additional resources might become available, however, not to the extent needed to service those students who were eligible to begin the program. With pressure mounting to control the flow of students, the faculty had to create an admissions procedure and have it in place for Winter 1987.

The short term solution developed was constrained by lack of time to investigate what other institutions were doing to face the problem. In coming months it became apparent that neighboring institutions were not experiencing the enrollment/funds allocation problem. Because of the immediacy of the problem the process was put into operation without being piloted.

While the members of the department worked on an admission process, the chairperson projected the maximum number of students the department could accommodate. The logistics of this task were complicated by the fact that while the elementary education program is housed in one department, support courses are furnished by other departments in the school. It was

necessary to coordinate with these departments to project the number of section which could be provided. Factors considered in determining the number of students to admit were the following: number of full-time faculty; desirable number of part-time faculty; numbers of sections that could be offered each year; maximum student-faculty ratios in both undergraduate courses and internship supervision; number of class sections needed per group of students in each concentration and the desirable distribution between undergraduate and graduate education. A decision was made to admit 90 students per year in two groups, 60 in Winter 1987 and 30 Fall 1987. The reason for this distribution was tied into class size and advice from the educational advisement office. In 1988 the program was further limited to a once a year admission with a maximum number of 75.

The faculty set eligibility scores as follows: (1) minimum GPA 2.5, (2) minimum GP 2.8 in each of the pre-professional courses, (3) PPST cut off 170 in each of the subtests. Values in each of these would be weighted and summed. Students would be ranked on the total score, and the top 75 would be admitted.

An explanation of the process, and problems associated with this process follows. This report concludes with a list of changes the department will implement in the future.

ISSUES INVOLVING ADMISSION OF CRITERIA

Grade Point Average (minimum 2.5)

*Questions which the committee has had to work through include the following:

* Should GPA include all university work or only work taken at admitting university?

The group decided that teaching involves the content knowledge from a breathe of experiences. Not to include course work taken before entrance to the admitting university might convey that the content knowledge for teaching will be mastered at the admitting university. This is false. In order to emphasize the need for students to be well prepared in content area it was decided to use GPA reflecting all university work.

** note Students must complete 42 transferrable university credits before applying.

* Should GPA reflect all course work or only education or non-education course work?

Under the current process, students must complete three education courses before applying to the elementary education program. These courses have been labeled pre-elementary education courses. Since the grade point in each of these courses has been used as a separate variable for admission to the program, we have computed grade point as "non-professional" grade point. That is, our elementary education advising office has recomputed grade points to back out the GPA for the pre-professional courses. If a student transfers in an equivalent for any of the three courses, their GPA is recomputed also.

* Does GPA include "old course work" taken prior to grade inflation?

Initially the process was implemented as follows:

All course work was treated in the same way. Thus a student who carried a low GPA from the past was assessed using that GPA. However, students have asked for wavers, and bases on the presentation of a logical well defined and documented argument, wavers have been made on eligibility.

Recently the faculty has created a process in which a student can identify the semester from which we should begin to compute GPA. In computing from that semester all course work appearing before that time is ignored, as are the grades for those semesters. If the student elects this option, they are required to fulfill their general education requirement and major/minor concentration requirements beginning with the semester from which the GPA is cumulated.

* Are grades from different institutions weighted equally?

At the present time grades from different institutions are weighted equally.

* Are transfer grades from change of majors weighed equally?

Originally grades using other majors were treated equally, thus the GPA of a student changing to elementary education from another major was transferred at the original value.

Recently the faculty has decided to recompute GPA for students who have taken the majority of their course work at this university and who are changing majors. Courses unique to the original major are ignored when computing the GPA.

* How are non-traditional grading systems processed?

The elementary education advising office has been most cooperative in trying to translate grading systems form different institutions into a 4 quality point system. They have asked students for catalogues of previous schools. etc. I have assisted in making judgements about European systems for a post bachelors candidate. We have asked the office of special advisement for aid. Our efforts have centered on being fair to each applicant.

Grades in specific pre-professional courses (minimum 2.8)courses

* Are transfer grades accepted?

With the assistance of our Advisement office, transfer courses have been accepted and a scale of letter grade to 4 quality point equivalence has been established.

* Are grades from two or more professors comparable?

There are multiple sections of our pre-professional courses taught by a number of faculty. Since scores in each of the pre-professional courses have been used as variables, we have decided to use standardized z scores rather than raw scores.

This is one of the fairest ways we have been able to initiate. If raw scores are used, students could be admitted (or denied) based on the grading philosophy of the instructor. Note, however, that translating to z scores has taken many hours of work.

I have gathered data on the number of students who were admitted using different combinations of rankings per class, and the findings show that several combinations of instructors would lead to non-admission because of selection of instructor.

Refer to Appendix A for a report of grade distribution.

Basic Skills Assessment

* Should we select or develop our own assessment tool?

When the department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership decided that it was necessary to revert to a restrictive admissions process, one of the first considerations was an assessment of basic skills. Our department is quite small. At the time of designing the process there were five full time member of the department, one of whom was on sabbatical. One of the full time members held position of chair along with a full load of classes. Because of lack of time, people, and money the group decided to use a published test rather than develop an in-house instrument. The question of liability was also a strong motivator to select a published test which had been used for the same purpose as admission to program.
The test selected was the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST)

As of April 1987, of 27 states who now require testing for admission to program 7 require the PPST.

	CUT OFF	READING	MATH	WRITING
ARIZONA		173	172	174
NEBRASKA		170	171	172
NEVADA		169	169	170
TENNESSEE		169	169	172
TEXAS		171	172	173
WEST VIRGINIA		172	172	171
WISCONSIN	NOT REPORTED			

OKLAHOMA SCHEDULED TO START USING THE PPST IN 1989

(Office of Educational Research and Improvement U.S. Department of Education, 1987, August)

* Who will administer the test?

This university is an approved testing site for the Educational Testing Service. We have made arrangements with our Special Advising office to administer the test.

* What are the cut off scores?

Cut off scores were established at the 170 score for each of the subtests on the PPST.

* Can students retake the PPST?

No limit has been set on the number of times subtests on the PPST can be retaken. However, because of the once a year admission students usually retake only one time. The highest score is used in computing scores for admission.

* Students' complaints about test anxiety

The faculty who teach in the pre-profession courses have tried to inform the students about the test, and testing procedures before the test is administered. On several occasions wavers have been granted because of gross differences between subtest scores and GP in coursework in english, rhetoric, or mathematics courses.

* Students' misunderstanding about cut off scores

The faculty has spent a great deal of time explaining raw score and derived scores to students. The complaint that they have missed the cut off score by one point is common. We have explained the concept of percentiles and norm-reference measures.

Refer to Appendix B for data on PPST.

The minimums have been set as requirements for eligibility. Those who are eligible are ranked on a total weighed sum. The chances of admission for students who petition for a wavier of minimum criteria is slight. If waivers are granted and the actual scores are used students will still not rank in the top 75.

We are not satisfied with the policy as it is. We are now changing our treatment of students who take the majority of their coursework at this university; we are raising the cut off scores on the PPST; we are raising our minimum non-professional GPA; we are restructuring our admission process to include the use of qualitative measures.

In conclusion, it has been a difficult time for the faculty. For the 1988 annual admission, more than half of those who were eligible for the program could not be admitted because of the 75 student limit. Since the next admission is a year away, faculty have advised students to apply to other schools whose numbers are not as limited as ours. Those schools are fortunate. We are sending students who have minimum grade point averages of 2.5, PPST minimum score of 170, and grade points in the pre-education courses of at least 2.8. It is indeed unfortunate that we must set criteria for restrictive admissions when the research literature on teacher effectiveness is so sparse in identifying characteristics in preservice teachers which are predictive of future teaching abilities.

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Appendix A

EED215

GRADE	I	J	K	L	M	N	TOTAL
4	3	8	15	0	1	0	27
3.9	6	3	0	0	1	0	10
3.8	2	4	2	0	1	2	11
3.7	4	7	3	1	2	1	18
3.6	5	7	2	3	3	1	21
3.5	4	1	4	0	4	0	13
3.4	4	0	3	1	0	0	8
3.3	3	0	5	0	2	0	10
3.2	1	0	2	1	0	1	5
3.1	2	0	2	0	0	0	4
3	2	0	0	0	2	0	4
2.9	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	36	30	39	6	16	5	132

EED 110 GRADE BY INSTRUCTOR

EED110 GRADE	A	B	C	D	TOTALS
4	0	2	2	3	7
3.9	0	9	1	2	12
3.8	1	11	4	1	17
3.7	0	11	8	6	25
3.6	4	4	3	5	16
3.5	3	3	6	1	13
3.4	3	2	6	1	12
3.3	5	1	1	0	7
3.2	8	0	5	0	13
3.1	1	0	2	0	3
3	4	0	2	0	6
2.9	2	0	1	0	3
2.8	1				
TOTALS	32	43	41	19	135 PLUS 2

EED210 GRADE	E	F	G	H	TOTALS
4	1	1	2	3	7
3.9	0	2	6	0	8
3.8	4	3	2	3	12
3.7	1	1	6	4	12
3.6	2	0	8	2	12
3.5	4	5	1	3	13
3.4	4	7	4	3	18
3.3	6	3	1	0	10
3.2	4	4	2	0	10
3.1	10	3	0	0	13
3	10	0	0	0	10
2.9	8	1	0	0	9
2.8	3				3
TOTAL	57	30	32	18	137

EED 110 ADMITTED-DENIED BY INSTRUCTOR

	ADMITTED	DENIED	(INC. APPEAL)
A	14	21	3
B	33	10	2
C	26	15	
D	12	7	

EED210 ADMITTED-DENIED

	ADMITTED	DENIED	(INC.APPEAL)
E	23	33	
F	22	8	
G	25	8	
H	15	4	

EED215 ADMITTED-DENIED

	ADMITTED	DENIED	(INC.APPEAL)
I	17	15	
J	26	4	
K	38	16	
L	0	3	
M	0	10	
N	0	4	

Appendix B

o PPST Undergraduate cutoff

Reading	170	18%ile
Math	170	20%ile
Writing	170	9%ile

o PPST Undergraduate
(scaled on 7/84-6/87)

Reading	174	36%ile
Math	174	33%ile
Writing	174	30%ile

proposed 88/89